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ABSTRACT

Since data from student evaluations of teachers are too often treated as though they were based upon superficial opinion surveys, this paper suggests a policy for evaluating teachers. The policy amounts in part to a method of jury selection, the jury being the student raters of a course. Several control variables with questionnaire items are listed that should be used in order to obtain more valid interpretations of student evaluations. The more sophisticated data so gathered can then be used by administrators, policy makers, and teachers for making course evaluations for teaching improvement as well as promotional decisions. The Learning Evaluation form is appended. (Author/LBH)

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SELECTING STUDENT JURORS FOR EVALUATING TEACHERS

by Carl Slawski

If we are going to use course evaluations for administrative decisions for the granting of tenure or promotion, we need to be more painstaking in the gathering of evidence. A simple matter of employing statistical controls of the data could make a big difference.

There is a new body of data to show that students rate teachers higher when they are taking a course because it is an elective rather than because it is required (Landis and Pirro, 1976). This should give us real cause for reflection. Yet even this fact avoids the real question of how much the student learns in the way of 1) facts, 2) skills, and above all in the way of 3) learning to think critically, 4) to apply theories to everyday life, or 5) to formulate original problems for himself. Keeping in mind these kinds of questions, which call for statistical cross-tabulations, I would like to suggest a policy for evaluating teachers, or at least a policy on eliminating students from the role of judge who have not done their share of work to make the course a worthwhile experience even for themselves. This will amount in part to a method of jury selection, the jury being the student raters of a course. It is of course a possibility to ask the student how much he feels he has learned. It is a rare course evaluation instrument that even asks this kind of perceptual question. Whether or not such a question is asked, the following questions need to be accounted for. All items below, or their equivalent, are included in the author's 39-item, machine-scorable questionnaire (cf. Appendix).

If a student:

A) Frequently or Sometimes Fell Behind in his preparation and work for a course, or
B) Disagrees or Strongly Disagrees that he was Well Prepared for each class, and
C) Finds the Work Load for the course "much heavier", or
D) Finds the Course "very difficult",

he is suspect as a judge of the course if he has spent less than nine hours of study per week for a three unit course.

Similarly, if a student 1) expects to receive a grade lower than or equal to a C, Fail or No Credit (i.e., a low grade in general, at least at most colleges today), he should be expected

A) to study no less than nine hours per week (for a three unit course), and

B) have consulted the instructor at least three times during the semester in his office (for at least five minutes per visit) [or have consulted the instructor for 20 minutes during the term in the instructor's office, rather than merely before and after class], and should have answered:

C) Agree or Strongly Agree to the question on whether he was well-prepared for each class,

D) Agree or Strongly Agree to the question on whether he made a serious effort to participate in class discussions, etc.,

E) Agree or Strongly Agree on whether h took adequate notes,

F) Agree or Strongly Agree on whether he put in a good deal of effort to understanding and applying ideas from the course.

G) Another screen question would be on how interested he is in the subject matter. (If Uninterested or minimally interested, he is a questionable witness.)

H) He should also have attended at least 85% of the classes.

If a student fails on any of these eight questions (or on the four above questions, viz., A or B, and C or D), a low rating of the teacher should not be counted as a valid mark against the teacher.

If the student is expecting a grade lower than his Grade Point Average, and fails on any of the above eight questions, he should not be taken as an "unbiased judge" of the instructor. His overall rating of the instructor should be discounted if it is lessthan "satisfactory", or if less than the department average (reliably established in previous semesters or terms).

SELECTING STUDENT JURORS

FOR EVALUATING TEACHERS

by Carl Slawski

Abstract

Data from student evaluations of teachers are too often treated as though based upon superficial opinion surveys. Control variables and contingency tables should be used, though they rarely are. Administrators, policy makers and teachers need to develop greater sophistication in data analysis in order to make course evaluations valuable for teaching improvement rather than merely to justify promotional decisions. Several control variables with questionnaire items are listed which should be employed in order to obtain more valid interpretations.

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In other words, if students fail (by their own admission on the evaluation questionnaire) on any of the above criteria, their ratings should be dropped for items on which they rate:

1) The overall value of the course (if only satisfactory, fair or poor),
2) Their opportunity for a worthwhile learning experience (if Disagree or Strongly Disagree), and
3) The course was a satisfactory learning experience (if Disagree or Strongly Disagree).

These criteria should be modified to suit the requirements, approach and goals of each course and each teacher and the standards of the department and institution.

It is also not unreasonable for an instructor to give a peremptory challenge of one low rating for each ten students or fraction thereof. There might be some personality conflict between student and instructor, ill humor on the part of the student on the day of the evaluations, unknown bias, or failure to perform or study (which the student fails to admit on the evaluation questionnaire).

If there are then too few raters left over after such challenges (e.g.,fewer than 50% of enrollees, or 50% of raters validly completing the questionnaire on all crucial items (namely, on all above items), then the ratings from the entire class may be thrown out at the instructor's discretion (after he sees the ratings).

This system of eliminating judges may make the establishment of norms, or the use of comparative averages between the ratings of the candidate for promotion or tenure with departmental or school or national averages invalid. I would also require that a minimum of six classes (or sections) be used for administrative evaluation in classes taught within the last three years.

A minimum acceptable "norm" could be A) a rating of "average" after challenges, i.e., an average rating of 1) "satisfactory" (on question 1

above), 2) "Agree" (on question 2 above), and 3) "Agree" (on question 3, above), or B) a mean in three out of four whole courses of not less than 0.5 below the "recognized and established department average" on these three items (or their reliably established equivalents).

All faculty members up for promotion or tenure who attain this minimum standard should be recommended without serious reservations at the earliest eligible date.

Any reservations expressed (serious or incidental) must be based on these above criteria, or on visitations of the candidate's classroom by at least two sympathetic colleagues. Each colleague should visit at least three whole class periods for any given class of students in one single course. Careful attention should be given to evaluating letters of present, and former students or alumni on behalf of faculty members for whom ten or more such evaluative letters have been written in the last two years.

Rankings of two or more acceptable candidates (by the above standards) may be based upon additional information on such factors as originality, creativity, imaginative approaches, emphasis on helping students to write more clearly, analytically, originally, etc., unusual practicality of applications, innovative classroom approaches or techniques, number of courses taught, introduction of new courses, sophistication of ideas, high level of theory well-presented, demonstrated success of alumni (for whom special help was given, such as letters written, graduate committees served on, etc.).

A recommendation to Full Professor should be based on data that is more complete, showing a somewhat more consistent pattern of acceptable ratings, more analytic thoroughness in evaluating teaching data (controlling for intervening or interfering variables, contingency tables, unusually careful analysis of teacher self-evaluations, evaluation by outside experts, etc.).

Implied in the above suggestions is a commentary upon the student public opinion surveys which have so easily captured the fancy of administrators in higher education. The administrative decision has become more important than the use of such instruments for improving teaching. If such care is not given to teacher evaluations and their analysis, we might well overlook a teacher who is unusually good with certain kinds of students, including slower students who seriously want to learn, or independent, original students. We should never be satisfied with the knowledge that course evaluation instruments distinguish known "best" and "worst" teachers, because these are subjective judgments at best. We fail in our duty as colleagues or administrators if we fail to consider the need to capitalize on the best in 1) the overall average teacher, or 2) a teacher who receives spuriously low ratings.

REFERENCES

Pirro, Ellen, and Larry M. Landis
1976 "Student Evaluation and the Rating of Course and Instructors: An Analysis of the Impact of Selected Student and Course Variables." St. Louis, Missouri, Midwest Sociological Society, April 23, 1976.

APPENDIX

A 39-item, machine-scorable questionnaire follows. It contains all items necessary to implement the policy discussed in the body of this paper. It happens to be oriented toward a teaching style that uses a minimum of lecturing.

12/20/75 LEARNING EVALUATION (Short Form)

Teacher's Name_____. Today's date_____
Course Title_____. Class Hour_____

CIRCLE THE NUMBER which indicates your evaluation of each item that follows.

1. The instructor was readily available for consultation with students.

Not Applicable	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0	4	3	2	1

2. The instructor encouraged students to think for themselves.

0	4	3	2	1

3. The instructor seemed genuinely concerned with students' progress and was actively helpful.

0	4	3	2	1

4. The instructor made helpful comments on papers or exams.

0	4	3	2	1

5. The instructor raised challenging questions or problems for discussion.

0	4	3	2	1

6. The instructor was open to other viewpoints.

0	4	3	2	1

7. The scope of the course has been too limited; not enough material has been covered.

0	4	3	2	1

* * * * * * * * *

8. I would rate the overall value of class discussions:

N/A or Don't Know	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Fair	Poor
0	5	4	3	2	1

9. I would rate the overall value of this course to me as:

0	5	4	3	2	1

* * * * * * * * * *

10. The work load for this course in relation to other courses of equal credit was:

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not Applicable	Much Lighter	Lighter	About the Same	Heavier	Much Heavier

11. For my preparation and ability, the level of difficulty of this course was:

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not Applicable	Very Elementary	Somewhat Elementary	About Right	Somewhat Difficult	Very Difficult

* * * * * * * * * *

12. I was well-prepared for each class (by careful reading of assignments and by completing the written work promptly).

N/A or Don't Know	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0	4	3	2	1

13. From the beginning of the course, I have been making a serious effort to participate in class discussions, simulation games, panels, or other oral demonstrations, at least by asking pertinent questions or volunteering opinions.

0	4	3	2	1

14. I have been putting a good deal of effort into understanding and applying ideas from this course.

0	4	3	2	1

15. In proportion to the amount of time and energy I have put into this course, and in proportion to my approach or skill in handling the resource materials available, I would say, on the whole, that this course has provided me with the opportunity for a worthwhile learning experience.

N/A or Don't Know	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0	4	3	2	1

16. The "facilitator" of this course was willing to provide resources for me to aid me with my chosen tasks and projects.
0 4 3 2 1

17. The facilitator allowed students freedom to choose from among different ways to complete the course requirements.
0 4 3 2 1

18. The facilitator was willing to entertain questions, opinions, expressions of feeling and other contributions from members of the class.
0 4 3 2 1

19. The facilitator's classroom personality style (in terms of leadership-followership and guidance) has generally been in tune with the method and goals of the course.
0 4 3 2 1

20. The facilitator provided the opportunity for me to relate course material to my own personal life and experience.
0 4 3 2 1

21. The facilitator provided the opportunity for me to learn to apply theories to concrete situations.
0 4 3 2 1

22. The facilitator provided the opportunity for me to learn to write good papers.
0 4 3 2 1

23. The facilitator has a good knowledge of the subject matter.
0 4 3 2 1

24. The facilitator encouraged students to take the initiative and responsibility for their own learning.
0 4 3 2 1

25. The course has been a satisfactory learning experience for me.
0 4 3 2 1

26. The grading system was fair.
0 4 3 2 1

27. The material of the course was presented in a way which allowed me the possibility or opportunity to organize it and better clarify it in my own mind.
0 4 3 2 1

28. I took adequate notes (both during class time and while reading assigned material) so that I was more able to grasp the main ideas of the course.
0 4 3 2 1

29. On the whole, has the instructor conducted this course in a professionally responsible manner relative to the announced objectives of the course?
1 =Yes. No= 2

10

(Turn to page 3.)

30. On the whole, has the instructor conducted this course in a professionally responsible manner relative to the announced objectives of the course?
A =Yes No= B .

31. Beginning with the first week of class, how well have you kept up with or on top of the regular (daily or weekly) reading and written assignments and other work for this course?

Not Applicable of Don't Know	I Frequently Fell Behind	I Sometimes Fell Behind	Usually Just Keeping Pace	Generally On Top Of Assignments	Nearly Always Ahead
0	E	D	C	B	A

32. How interested are you in the subject matter of this course?

0	D	C	B	A
Don't Know	Extremely Interested	Somewhat Interested	Somewhat Uninterested	Minimally or Not at All Interested

33. Compared to other courses of equal credit, how much did you learn overall based on your study and experience related to this course?

0	D	C	B	A
Don't Know	An Exceptional Amount	A Great Deal	A Moderate Amount	A Little Bit or Nothing at all

34. Have you failed to attend more than four 75-minute, six 50-minute, or two 3-hour class periods? A =Yes; No= B .

35. Why are you taking this course? A=Major requirement; B=Required for minor; C=College requirement but not part of major or minor field; D=Elective not required in any way. E=Other: Specify: _____.

[Later you will be asked to transfer your answers to items 36-39 onto the 9-digit answer section of the answer sheet.]

36. On the average, approximately how many hours per week have you studied during the term to prepare for this course? (Circle one number.)
1-hour 2-hours 3 4 5 6 7 8=(more than 7 hours per week) 9=(more than 12 hours per week)

37. How many times during the semester or term have you consulted the instructor in his office during office hours or by appointment (for more than five minutes at a time)? (Circle the number corresponding to the appropriate number of times.)
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9=(more than eight times)

38. What grade do you expect to receive in this course? (Circle appropriate number.)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
=D	=C	=B	=A	=Fail	=Pass	=No Credit	=Other

39. What is your approximate cumulative grade-point average? (Circle number opposite correct average.)

1 = 3.50-4.00	3 = 2.50-2.99	6 = 1.00-1.49
2 = 3.00-3.49	4 = 2.00-2.49	7 = Less than 1.00
	5 = 1.50-1.99	8 = None yet--freshman or transfer

Feel free to write in additional comments and constructive suggestions to the instructor on the backside of these pages.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION!

Next, please turn to the standard answer sheet. Use a #2 pencil.

1) Fill in the spaces to indicate your student number, your sex (Boy or Girl), and birth date (in the corner of the sheet).
2) Print instructor's name after "Instructor (along the side of the sheet).
3) Print the course title in the space after "city".
4) Write in the "hour at which the class meets" after "Grade".
5) Write in "today's date" after "Test."
6) Finally, please blacken the spaces on the 5-digit part of the answer sheet (with the special pencil) for items numbered 1 through 35. For "Don't know" or "Not Applicable" answers leave the space blank on the answer sheet. Then answer items 36 through 39 in the first four of the six 9-digit columns in the corner of the answer sheet. That is, Answer item 36 in column 1; 37 in column 2; 38 in 3; and 39 in 4.